01/19/24 • BIG TECH › NEWS

50 Bills to Expand Wireless Infrastructure Up for Consideration by Federal Lawmakers

Critics say the bills overlook the benefits of fiber internet, strip local communities of the right to reject wireless projects and increase the risk to human health and the environment caused by greater exposure to wireless radiofrequency radiation.

By Suzanne Burdick, Ph.D.

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Federal lawmakers are considering 50 bills that promote the expansion of wireless infrastructures on land and in space, according to the scientific research and education nonprofit Environmental Health Trust (EHT).

Together, the bills stand to increase people's exposure to wireless radiofrequency (RF) radiation, EHT said.

Research has linked RF radiation with many negative health issues including oxidative stress and DNA damage, cardiomyopathy, carcinogenicity, sperm damage, memory damage and other neurological effects.

The American Broadband Deployment Act of 2023 (H.R.3557), the "most prominent" among the slew of proposed bills, would strip what little remains of local residents' control over the types of wireless projects that get built next to their homes and their kids' schools by fast-tracking the application approval process.

The bill also would exempt many wireless projects, such as the installation of 5G cell towers or small cells along city streets, from having to follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Many national groups — including EHT and Children's Health Defense (CHD) — oppose the bill. The National League of Cities, the United States Conference of Mayors, the National Association of Counties and the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors said in a joint letter the bill "deprives citizens and their local governments of the ability to preserve property rights and maintain public safety."

The National Call for Safe Technology, a "coalition of over 100 organizations and individuals advocating for technology that preserves individual privacy and security," agreed, stating in a position letter that the bill would "eliminate the people's voice" by prohibiting state and local governments from putting a moratorium on wireless projects.

Commenting on this and the other 49 bills, Miriam Eckenfels-Garcia, director of CHD's Electromagnetic Radiation (EMR) and Wireless program, said, "These bills fly in the face of evidence that cell towers and small cells endanger human health, harm the environment and jeopardize people's privacy."

CHD is "closely monitoring these dangerous developments" and has supported grassroots groups' efforts to defeat the bills via calls to action, Eckenfels-Garcia told The Defender:

> "We are particularly concerned about H.R.3557 as this measure proposes the most sweeping and comprehensive changes to the wireless infrastructure permitting process and would essentially remove local control and participation.
>
> "This bill would narrow many of the avenues we are using in our strategic litigation efforts as well."

CHD opposes H.R.4141, which seeks to give wireless projects the same exemptions from environmental and historical review for wireless projects as H.R.3557, she added.

Susan Foster, a fire and utility consultant, called the bills "draconian" measures. "They give telecom the right to put cell towers pretty much everywhere, exposing us all to RF radiation 24/7

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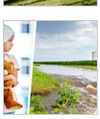
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against our will. The fire risk alone should prohibit these towers from residential areas, schools and daycare centers."

Foster — who co-founded the nonprofit California Fires & Firefighters — told The Defender every cell tower is an electrical device that can fail, and fire is a potential consequence of failure.

"Such electrical fires cannot be extinguished through conventional means," Foster said. "The grid has to be cut first ... some of these fires are taking place in front of people's homes. People need time to escape and they don't always have the opportunity to do so."

'It's a lie'

H.R.3557 — which has yet to be scheduled for a floor vote — passed the U.S. House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee in May 2023. The committee's chairwoman, Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.) praised the bill, claiming it will "help close the digital divide."

"High-speed broadband is a vital part of our economy, yet many Americans still do not have access to these important services," Rodgers said.

However, deploying more wireless antennas doesn't ensure that underserved communities will have affordable access to quality internet, according to Brenda Martinez, an activist and founding board member of the grassroots group Fiber First LA.

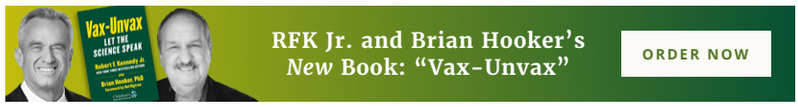
"It's a lie," according to Martinez, who said fiber — not wireless — internet is what low-income communities need and deserve. Fiber means "more speed for less money," requires less maintenance and doesn't carry health concerns from wireless radiation.

H.R.3557 means deploying "a zillion antennas" but doesn't discuss the quality or affordability aspects of the digital divide, said Martinez, a fellow with CHD's EMR program. She told The Defender:

> "Our legislators are using low-income communities as an excuse to fill the Big Telecom pockets. H.R.3557 will not close the digital divide, it'll only exacerbate it.
>
> "People need to start waking up and taking action by informing themselves. Otherwise, our legislators will do what is convenient for the pockets of the lobbyists and the telecom industry, rather than what's best for our communities and our people."

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has an Affordable Connectivity Program that "helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more" — but H.R.3557 doesn't deal with the FCC's program.

The Defender asked Rep. Earl L. "Buddy" Carter (R-Ga.) — who introduced the bill — for a response to critics' concerns that the measure would strip away residents' control while failing to ensure internet affordability. Carter's office did not respond by our publication deadline.



People have already paid for fiber

There's a national funding battle going on between fiber and wireless, according to Odette Wilkens, a technology attorney who is president and general counsel for Wired Broadband, Inc., a nonprofit that advocates for hard-wired, high-speed internet. She told The Defender:

> "There's federal funding for fiber. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration [NTIA] is providing $42.45 billion in federal funding to expand high-speed internet access through the BEAD [Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment] Program — and the NTIA has prioritized fiber over wireless."

Andy Berke, NTIA's special representative for broadband, said, "Fiber is future proof. If we put something in the ground, we know we are only going to have to put it in the ground once."

Wilkens also pointed out that a 2020 court case proved many residents already funded fiber to the home through state and federal regulated rates.

"It was a classic 'bait-and-switch' case," said W. Scott McCollough, the attorney who argued the case.

McCollough, who is now the chief litigator for CHD's EMR cases, explained:

> "We showed that in many states basic local service ratepayers had paid higher regulated rates in return for repeated promises that advanced fiber-based services and Internet access would come to their homes and businesses but it was never delivered. Instead, the money went to cell towers.
>
> "Now, taxpayers are being asked to pay for what ratepayers were promised and paid for but never received."

Wilkens said that experts, such as the National Institute for Science, Law and Public Policy, have pointed out that wireless and fiber are not equivalent broadband technologies — and that fiber is unmatched in speed, performance and reliability.

"Chattanooga, Tennessee — with fiber wired to all homes and businesses — has the fastest internet in the U.S., if not the world, and is now forging into quantum broadband speeds, which are only possible with fiber," she said. "That should be the norm for every city in the U.S."

Nonetheless, bills promoting wireless networks continue to gain traction in Congress, Wilkens said. "We haven't seen movement lately with H.R.3557, probably because of all of the opposition," but other wireless bills have been "getting traction lately."

Wilkens provided The Defender with a summary of those bills:

- H.R.1339 Precision Agriculture Satellite Connectivity Act: Promotes satellite use on agricultural land.
- H.R.1338 Satellite and Telecommunications Streamlining Act: Requires the FCC to process satellite applications, with a similar approach as H.R.3557. Covers land and oceans.
- S.2542/H.R.6142 Last Acre Act: Establishes a USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] grant/loan program to provide broadband to farms for the purpose of precision agriculture, including wireless infrastructure and networks for IoT [Internet of Things] on farms.
- S.1642/H.R.4227 Reconnecting Rural America Act: Amends ReConnect Act … with a 100/100Mb [megabyte] speed minimum; promoting a "technology neutral" approach which means wireless.
- S.2855 CLOSE THE GAP Act: Compels wireless deployment on 95% of federal lands, eliminating NEPA and NHPA reviews for expansions of existing wireless facilities (under 6409a exemption), similar to H.R.3557.
- S.2018 Connect Our Parks Act: Compels wireless deployment in national parks creating a forest fire hazard. [This bill has now been has been included in H.R. 6492 Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act.]

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Suzanne Burdick, Ph.D.

Suzanne Burdick, Ph.D., is a reporter and researcher for The Defender based in Fairfield, Iowa.

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lonerngr88
15 days ago

"grant/loan program to provide broadband to farms for the purpose of precision agriculture, including wireless infrastructure and networks for IoT [Internet of Things] on farms." If houseplants don't thrive when placed near your router what makes them believe putting wi-fi on agricultural farms is a good idea?

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BarbaraCharis
15 days ago edited

Radiation is radiation is radiation...and it is destroying the lives of many people. . The sub-morons representing us in Congress have so little intelligence that they pass bills without any comprehension of how dangerous they are; plus it seems they have no qualms about voting the way they are paid to vote by corporate lobbyists. President Trump wanted to get rid of lobbyists. However, the faux Russian Collusion fiasco took precedence for much of his term....and he didn't accomplish everything he set out to do. Americans need to presure their representatives to get lobbyists out of Washington and out of the picture. They have no right to buy and influence our legislator's votes.

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holisticpoet
15 days ago

All power not specifically granted to the Federal Government are reserved for the States. The Feds have no legal authority to implement any law of this nature.

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Voyt Regnal
15 days ago

"...many negative health issues .." for these idiots lawmakers as well. They will be cooked in RF radiation like others. 😛

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Susann H
9 days ago

The National Toxicology Program (NTP) has no plans to further study the effects of cellphone radiofrequency radiation (RFR) on human health — even though the program's own $30 million study that took about 10 years to complete in 2018 reported evidence of cancer and DNA damage. https://sharylattkisson.com...

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kaoshispano
13 days ago

A CLEAR SIGN of the ending of the CIVILIZATION... it seems is for confort and developing but it KILLS. Another cheat of the DEVIL.

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Deborah Cooney
14 days ago

Since 2011, I have been conducting a federal case for an injunction against the Smart Grid and other EMF radiation on constitutional grounds. The Fifth Amendment takings clause prohibits the non-consensual transmission of wireless data through private property, such as our homes. We are in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, fully briefed, awaiting the scheduling of oral arguments. A win would have widespread repercussions for the entire wireless industry. It would reassert our constitutional right to reject any or all wireless activity on our private property.

Neither CHD, nor Kennedy, nor McCollough, nor Gresser have supported this effort. They have been mired in the regulatory statutes, choosing to ignore the overarching constitutional issue. With all of their resources, education, and intelligence, they have been unsuccessful at stemming the onslaught of harmful radiation. Their strategy is failing. Are we really going to address 50 new bills? How many next year -150? As you can see, that is a losing proposition. Only a constitutional win can stop this madness.

I am not bashing CHD. I am a lifetime member and I support the work they are doing. What will it take to get them on the right track?

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Susann H ↗ Deborah Cooney
9 days ago

In their own reports - The National Toxicology Program (NTP) has no plans to further study the effects of cellphone radiofrequency radiation (RFR) on human health — even though the program's own $30 million study that took about 10 years to complete in 2018 reported evidence of cancer and DNA damage.
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Matt
14 days ago

Until complacent citizens wake up and realize consequences of these programs, the beat will march us into the digital enslavement they've envisioned for us..

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Tonya
15 days ago

This is insane!! There is plenty of evidence going back many many years of damage and harm, to all living organisms. The republican 'representatives ' who wrote or are in favor of these bills are clearly being bought out. On that note, none of our representatives actually represent we the people. I don't recall ever being asked by any of those who represent us what my thoughts are on such things. Nor have I ever received a response to any of my communications to them telling them what their constituents are in favor of or opposed to. I get their newsletters, which are so out of touch with what we the people want. Taking about working on things that are irrelevant. So frustrating. I cannot wrap my head around anyone who supposedly cares about us would be for the forcing of harmful emf/rf on us with no way to stop it

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